DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 958 JC 860 003

AUTHOR Staples, Katherine; And Others
TITLE ACC Study Guide Series, II.
INSTITUTION Austin Community Coll., TX. Rio Grande Campus.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 9p.; A joint project of the Humanities Division and Learning Resources Center--Rio Grande Campus. For the first series of ACC Study Guides, see ED 234 869.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Materials (For Learner) (051)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Correspondence; Community Colleges; *Information Sources; *Library Skills; *Literature Reviews; Student Research; Study Guides; Study Skills; *Test Wiseness; Two Year Colleges; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

This series of one-page study guides offers helpful hints and tips to students on the art of successful studying. The guides in this collection include: (1) Improving Your Test-Taking Skills, which covers preparing for tests, reducing test anxiety, and things to do upon receiving a test and before turning in a test; (2) Strategies for Test Questions, which offers suggestions for answering objective and essay questions and for solving problems; (3) Finding Book Reviews, which suggests a variety of indexes and resources; (4) Finding Literary Criticism, which covers general sources and those for novels, short stories, poetry, and drama; (5) Writing about Literature, which comments on audience, getting started, defining and supporting a thesis, and writing well; (6) Writing Effective Business Letters, which identifies the parts of a letter and discusses purpose, style, and format; and (7) Biography--Information about a Person, which lists general and specialized biographical sources. (EJV)

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ACC STUDY GUIDE SERIES II

by
Katherine Staples
Sharon Adams
Toma Iglehart

Austin Community College
Austin, Texas

A JOINT PROJECT OF THE HUMANITIES DIVISION
AND LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER, RIO GRANDE CAMPUS

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ACC Study Guide Series

IMPROVING YOUR TEST-TAKING SKILLS

Instructors use tests to measure how much students have learned. Unfortunately, tests also measure students' test-taking skills. While these skills won't help if you don't know course material, they can keep you from losing points needlessly.

Preparing for Tests

* Be rested and comfortable. If you take a test when you are hungry, tired, or hung over, you won't perform well.

* Know what to expect. Learn ahead of time the kind of test you'll be taking, where and when it will be held, and what materials to bring. Arrive on time to avoid last-minute pressure.

* Expect some anxiety. Being concerned will help you do your best on a test.

* Avoid worried test-takers. Extreme nervousness, called test anxiety, will interfere with your work. Remember, test anxiety is contagious and unproductive.

Reducing Test Anxiety

* Keep a positive attitude. Decide to do your best, and don't blame yourself for what you don't know.

* Concentrate on the test. Don't worry about your ability, the behavior of other people, the number of questions, or even short memory lapses. Pay close attention to one question at a time. This kind of concentration reduces anxiety.

* Relax. If you are too nervous to think or read carefully, try to slow down physically. Change your mood by taking several slow, deep breaths. Then start to work.

When You Get Your Test

* Put your name on the test paper or answer sheet.

* Read the test instructions carefully. Be sure you understand what's expected of you, and ask questions if you don't.

* **Preview the test, make sure your copy is complete, then plan your time for each part of the test, including a few minutes to look over your test after you have finished it.**

* Answer the easiest questions first. You'll feel more confident, and you may also find some helpful ideas for the more difficult questions.

* Read each test question carefully, no matter what kind of test you are taking.

Before You Turn In Your Test

* Fight the urge to leave as soon as you have finished. It's natural, but it can hurt your grade.

* Review the test questions and your answers to them. Make any changes you think are important, but don't change your answers unless you have a good reason to do so.

* Review your own performance on the test. If you take a few notes on your test-taking skills, you'll be able to perform better on future tests. Ask yourself:

  Did I use my time well?

  What was asked that I didn't expect? How can I predict better for the next test?

  What part of the test was most difficult? Why?

  Did test questions come more from readings or from lecture material?

  What should I do differently in preparing for the next test?

For more information on test-taking skills, consult Raygor and Work, *Systems for Study;* Preston and Botel, *How to Study;* and Richardson, *Coping With Test Anxiety.*

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ACC Study Guide Series

STRATEGIES FOR TEST QUESTIONS

Different kinds of tests require different kinds of test-taking strategies. This handout will provide you with some helpful approaches for objective questions, essay questions and test problems.

Objective Questions

True-false or multiple choice questions appear on objective tests. Since both types of question involve understanding a statement and making a choice in response to it, strategies for answering well are very similar.

* Look for the central idea of each question. What is the main point?

* Look for helpful key words like: **always, never, none, except, most, least.** Underline key words if you can write on the test paper.

* Try to supply your own answer to a multiple choice question before you look at the alternatives. Then choose the alternative closest to your own answer.

* Mark an answer for every question. You are rarely penalized for guessing. You may lose credit by guessing incorrectly, but an unanswered question will cost you credit automatically.

* If all else fails and you have to guess an answer, then and only then consider this advice.

  The length of the choices is sometimes a clue. When guessing, pick the long answer - it is easier for instructors to write short wrong answers than long ones.

  If two choices are very similar, choose neither.

  If two choices are opposite, choose one of them.

  The most general alternative is frequently the right answer.

* Don't change your original answer unless you're completely sure it's wrong.

Essay Questions

When you answer an essay question, you're showing how well you can explain and support an idea, not just what you know. Keep the following ideas in mind.

* Read over all the essay questions before you start to write. Underline key words like **define, compare, explain, describe** or **discuss.** Jot down ideas on scratch paper, and then start with the easiest questions first.

* Think before you write, and try to outline your response. Remember, a good answer

  — often starts with a direct response to the question.

  — mentions the topics or areas which the essay question describes.

  — provides specific as well as general information.

  — uses the technical vocabulary of the course.

* Write legibly. Graders sometimes presume your ignorance if they can't read your writing.

* Always write something, and leave a space at the end so that you can add to your answer.

* Proofread your essay answers. The few minutes you spend correcting errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling can improve your grade.

Solving Problems

When you work a problem, ask yourself three questions:

1) What are you being asked to find?

2) What do you need to know in order to find this?

3) What are you already given in the problem to help you with your search?

After working through the problem, look back at what it asked you to find. Does your answer cover it? If not, go through the three questions again.

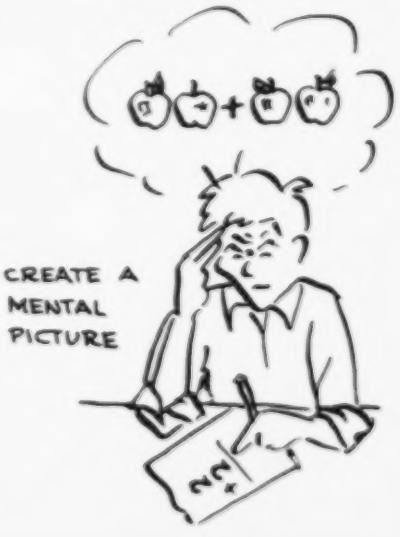
Good problem solvers have these characteristics:

* Positive attitude. They believe that problems can be solved by careful, persistent (though sometimes lengthy) analysis, not by fast answers based on previous knowledge.

* Concern for accuracy. They read a problem several times, trying to understand it. They review their judgments and conclusions, avoid guessing, and check their work.

* Methodical planning. They break work into parts and then solve it step by step, starting with the simplest step.

* Concentration. They use their energy to solve problems by talking to themselves about what they are doing, creating mental pictures, relating the problem to familiar experiences, counting or drawing pictures.



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FINDING BOOK REVIEWS

A good book review can provide important information about a book's style, plot and quality and about the author's credentials. It will reflect the current critical response to a book and often give comparisons to other similar titles. Remember that a book review is usually published within a year of the book's publication, so it will not include the more measured, comparative analysis that is found in good literary criticism. (See the study guide **Finding Literary Criticism.**)

Book Review Digest

To find book reviews, first look in the *Book Review Digest* on the library index shelves. Check your book's year of publication (listed in the front of the book or on the library catalog) and start searching in that year's volume. Reviews will continue to be published after the book is out, so reviews may be listed in *Digest* volumes several years later than the publication date. The *Digest* gives a brief plot summary and excerpted quotes from selected reviews. It also gives the length of the full reviews, which can be helpful when choosing a review to examine. (See the example.) At ACC, The *Book Review Digest* is available back to 1950.

Book Review Index

If you can't find a review in the *Digest*, try *Book Review Index*, also on the index shelves. This index lists references only, but it examines more review magazines than the *Digest*. Thus you may find a more obscure title listed here. (See the example.)

BOOK REVIEW INDEX

LOUIS, J C - The Cola Wars
BL - v77 - N 1 '80 - p378
BS - v40 - Mr '81 - p439
BW - v10 - D 14 '80 - p7
CSM - v73 - Ja 28 '81 - p17
Choice - v18 - My '81 - p1310
Har Bus R - v59 - Mr '81 - p74

Magazine Index

Don't overlook the *Magazine Index*, which lists book reviews as part of its general index. The *Magazine Index* lists magazines from 1977 to the present and is more current in its book review listings. This index prints a grade next to the review source, indicating the general tone of the review. The reviews are listed by author and by title.

Other Indexes

Other indexes in the library have review sections in the back of the volume or listed under "Book Reviews." Try some of the indexes listed below:

Applied Science & Technology Index
Business Periodicals Index
General Science Index
Humanities Index
Microcomputer Index
Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature
Social Sciences Index
The Texas Observer Index

The ACC libraries subscribe to many sources for book reviews. The most familiar is probably *New York Times Book Review*, which prints several long, detailed reviews as well as shorter paragraphs on fiction and nonfiction in each weekly issue. The longer reviews often cover a wide range of historical, social and philosophical comments in addition to reviewing the book. For shorter evaluations, library selection tools such as *Library Journal*, *Choice* and *Booklist* are helpful. These journals cover a wider range of titles than the *New York Times Book Review*, although they may not be as critical in their evaluation of the book.

Don't overlook familiar magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Business Week* for medium length, evaluative reviews. Special subject reviews are also available in such magazines as *Science Books and Films*, *American Historical Review*, *American Literature*, *History: Reviews of New Books*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *Texas Humanist* and the *Texas Observer*. Many of these are listed in the indexes noted above, but for some, another specialized index may need to be consulted.

Ask one of the librarians for help in your search for book reviews. They are familiar with many sources, as they must read reviews to select books for the library.

BOOK REVIEW DIGEST 1981

LOUIS, J. C. The cola wars [by] J. C. Louis and Harvey Z. Yazijian. 386p $15.95 '80 Everest House
338.7 Coca-Cola Company, PepsiCo, inc.
ISBN 0-89696-052-8 LC 79-51190

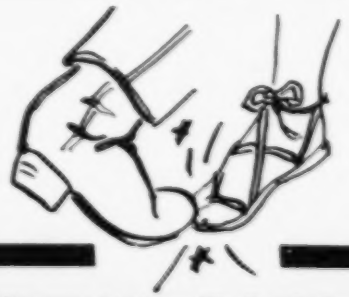
This is the study of two American companies in the soft drink industry, PepsiCo and the Coca-Cola Company. The authors examine the history of each and the methods each uses in pursuit of the national and the international market. Index.

Choice 18:1310 My '81 180w

"The corporate infighting between Coke and Pepsi, as one must keep reminding oneself, is a cosmic battle over a product that the authors of 'The Cola Wars' rightfully classify as 'utterly superfluous'. . . . As a Pepsi vice-president concedes: 'No one needs it.' What elevates this carbonated-warchronicle above the fizzy inconsequentiality of its subject matter, or the trade-journal dryness of yet another account of industrial competition, is the extent to which—both in this country and the rest of the world—the colas have come to symbolize (however distortedly) American life." P. C. Stuart

Magazine Index Example:

Tough Guys Don't Dance (book reviews)
by Norman Mailer
B New York v 17, Aug 13, '84 - p53
A Time v124 - Aug 6, '84 - p66



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FINDING LITERARY CRITICISM

Literary criticism describes, interprets, and evaluates literary works. Reading literary criticism can help you better understand an author's work and define your own views about it.

This study guide will help you find basic sources of literary criticism. Two other ACC study guides might also be helpful - **Finding Book Reviews** and **Finding Biographical Information.**

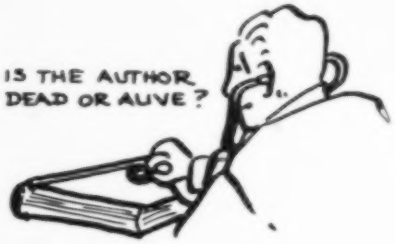
STEP 1: Check the *subject section* of the library catalog to find books about an author. Criticism will have the subheading "criticism and interpretation" after the author's name, as in:

FAULKNER, WILLIAM, 1897-1962 — CRITICISM AND INTERPRETATION

When you find a book on the shelf, check the index and table of contents to see if it contains useful material. Other students may have checked out all the relevant books already. If so, don't despair; go to step 2.

STEP 2: Use the reference collection. The reference librarian will help you. Some frequently used reference sources are listed below. Some of these contain criticism; others only show where to look for criticism.

The reference books on literary criticism usually cover a particular time period and/or type of writing. Before you can make an intelligent selection from these sources, you need to ask yourself the following questions:



- When and where did the author live?
- Is the author alive or dead?
- Is the author major or minor?
- Does the author primarily write novels, short stories, drama or poetry?
- Did the author write primarily in English?

GENERAL

Contemporary Literary Criticism - REF PN 771 .C59 - for living authors

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism-REF PN 771 .G27- for 20th century deceased authors.

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism - REF PN 761 .N5

Each set listed above contains excerpts from criticism of major authors, as well as references to additional criticism. Check the cumulative author index in the last volume under the author's name to find entries.

Magill's Bibliography of Literary Criticism - REF PN 523 .M35

This bibliography contains references to criticism of fiction, drama and poetry from ancient times to the present.

Masterplots - REF PN 44 .M33

Although primarily a source of plot summaries, this set sometimes includes short critical commentaries on the world's major literary works.

Survey of Contemporary Literature - REF PN 44 .M34

This set critiques American books published between 1954-1976 and also includes references for further study. It covers novels, poetry collections, drama and nonfiction.

Magill's Literary Annual - REF PN 44 .M335

These essay-reviews of outstanding American books published during a year include plot summaries and some criticism. This set covers books published after 1976.

NOVELS

Critical Survey of Long Fiction - REF PN 3451 .C7

After a short biography and summation of each author's achievements, this work offers several pages of analysis of the author's work. The index in the last volume lists all authors and works discussed.

The Contemporary Novel - REF PN 3365 .A227 1972

For each novelist this book lists general criticism and criticism of individual novels published in other books and magazines.

SHORT STORIES

Critical Survey of Short Fiction - REF PN 3321 .C7

This work briefly discusses the author's life, influence and story characteristics, then analyzes one or more of the author's short stories in detail. The index in the last volume lists all authors and stories covered.

Twentieth-Century Short Story Explication - PN 3373 .W344 1977

Indexes criticism in other books and magazines on individual short stories. This library only has a few of the sources; ask the librarian to show you which.

POETRY

Critical Survey of Poetry - REF PN 1111 .C7

This work gives principal works, achievements, biography and several pages of analysis for each poet covered. The last volume indexes all poets and titles of poems discussed.

An Index to Criticism of British and American Poetry - REF PR 89 .C5

Poetry Explication: A Checklist of Interpretation - REF PR 502 .K866 1980

These are indexes to poetry explication printed elsewhere.

DRAMA

McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama - REF PN 1625 .M3

This set provides "factual information and critical evaluations" of the world's dramatists from ancient times to the twentieth century. As well as critical commentary, the book includes a short biography, synopses of selected plays, a complete list of plays and a list of criticism published elsewhere for major dramatists. Lesser dramatists have only encyclopedia-type articles.

Drama Criticism: A Checklist of Interpretation since 1940 of English and American Plays - REF PN 2595 .C664

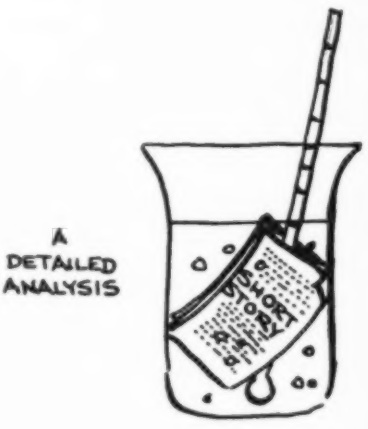
Dramatic Criticism Index - REF PN 2595 .B624 1972

European Drama Criticism, 1900-1975 - REF PN 1721 .P2 1977

The sources listed above index criticism published in other books and magazines. While ACC will not have may of these sources, UT will.

OTHER CRITICAL SOURCES

There are many specialized sources on blacks, women and Latin American authors and authors of specific types of writing, time periods and localities. If you don't find what you need, ask a reference librarian for assistance.



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Students of literature often wonder where to begin with a first writing assignment. Is a book report-style plot summary right? Many literary critics have had important things to say. How can a student's ideas be as good?

In literature - fiction, poetry or drama - writers use special forms and structures of language to express their values. When you write about a literary work, you should explain your ideas about the work's values and evaluate the ways these values, or themes, are presented. In other words, a book report-style summary which answers the question "what did it say?" is not original or interesting. An analysis , which explains and evaluates how and why an author wrote, can be both. If you support your ideas with a close reading of the literary work you're discussing and if you explain your ideas clearly, your interpretation of a literary work can be as valid as anyone else's. You'll also find your own literary analysis a stimulating opportunity to present and argue for your views.

Your Audience

Assume that you are writing for a group of intelligent readers who have read the work you are discussing, who are interested in hearing a new interpretation of it, and who may or may not agree with you. Your purpose in writing about literature will be to persuade through discussion, not merely to inform.

Getting Started

First of all, make sure that you understand the scope and purpose of your essay assignment. Read it through carefully. Then discuss the assignment with your instructor. When you are sure of the problem the assignment describes, you are ready to develop your own answers.

To find original ideas, start with a few careful readings of the text itself. Mark the margins of your copy with questions, comments and responses. Underline sections you find especially interesting and significant. Look for repeated patterns. By the time you have finished your careful reading, you should be familiar with the work and understand the way it uses literary elements you have studied. Your ideas and feelings will be your most useful resources for writing; these ideas and feelings (and confidence) can only come from real familiarity with the work you want to discuss.

Defining A Thesis

The essay topic your instructor assigns will help you to direct your discussion, but remember - in analysis, there's no one simple right answer. You'll need to apply the essay assignment to your ideas to come up with your own thesis: a limited statement which you can prove by discussing the literary work. Be daring, but be sure that you can support the thesis you select.

It's important to limit the scope of your discussion to a particular approach (an analysis of symbolism? of character? a comparison of different versions of one work?). Your completed thesis will become an introduction in which you explain your purpose, scope and topic to your reader.

Supporting Your Thesis

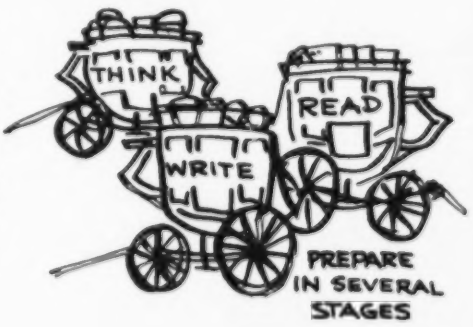
Use the notes you have made to develop the body of your argument. Notecards and marked pages will help. When you use direct quotations, make sure that they are introduced clearly and that they are directly relevant to the point you are making. Don't overquote, or you'll seem to be asking another author to write your essay for you. If you read the work of critics, make sure that you document ideas that are not your own.

Writing Well

Your essays about literature should discuss your ideas and should be written in your voice, from the head and the heart. Don't try to impress your reader with a pretentious style.

Your essays about literature should reflect careful writing as well as careful thinking. Make sure that your statements about literary works are accurate and well supported, and proofread carefully to correct all mistakes in writing. You'll have better luck in writing and proofing if you prepare your essays in several stages.

When your essay has explored and supported the issues of your thesis fully, when it's organized logically and revised to reflect a clear, direct writing style free from careless errors, it's finished. If your thesis and discussion interested you, they'll interest your reader as well.



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WRITING EFFECTIVE BUSINESS LETTERS

Business letters require good solid communication skills and knowledge of business letter conventions. This handout will provide you with guidelines for writing business letters that will transact business quickly, effectively and courteously.

When Do You Write a Business Letter?

Business letters represent you when you conduct transactions in writing. For example, you might write to request a price list, apply for a job or inquire about a refund policy.

Though your letter should not be particularly personal in tone, it should reflect courtesy, clarity and an understanding of your reader's needs. In business, time is valuable. Make it easy for your reader to help you by writing simply and by including only information your reader needs.

Business Letter Style

Make your letters readable and direct. Prefer short, accurate word choices, short sentences and orderly paragraphs.

BUSINESS LETTER CONVENTIONS

These are easy to read, understand and remember. Use personal pronouns, active voice and action verbs. Avoid formal and stuffy expressions (like "thanking you in advance," "as per," "be advised" or "enclosed herewith"), and don't use technical terms unless you are positive your reader will understand them as you do. Don't write to impress; write to explain.

Preparing Your Letters

Make your letters readable by typing them on 8 1/2 by 11 inch typing paper. Make them easy to read. Check your text for clarity, completeness and readability, and don't ever forget to proofread. Minor errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar hurt your credibility. Make sure that your letters look neat and tidy on the page. Sloppy appearance will detract from even a well written letter.

PARTS OF A BUSINESS LETTER

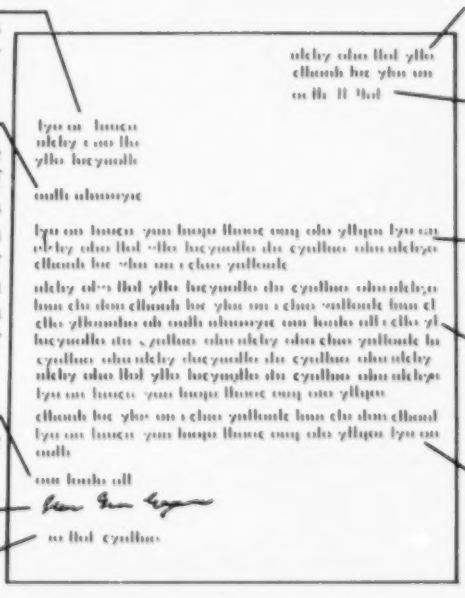
Recipient Address
Give the reader's name and address as they are on the envelope in which your letter is mailed.

Salutation or Attention Line
Always address your reader by name prefaced with "Dear." This form of address is called a "salutation" and is always punctuated with a colon. When writing to a department or to a manager you do not know by name, use an attention line. (Example: "Attention Claims Manager"). Avoid stuffy "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam" salutations.

Complimentary Close
"Sincerely" is a good choice. Punctuate your close with a comma.

Your Signature

A Typed Copy of Your Name



Return Address
Always provide your address so that your reader can contact you.

Date
The date on which you write is an important way for you to record the date of your message.

Introduction
Begin your letter with a short statement of your subject and reason for writing.

Your Text
Explain your subject fully and clearly. Be accurate and don't waste your reader's time with unnecessary details.

Closing
End your letter by saying something helpful or courteous to your reader. If you thank your reader, explain why.

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BIOGRAPHY - INFORMATION ABOUT A PERSON

"History is the essence of innumerable biographies."
Thomas Carlyle, *On History*

Finding information about a person can be difficult for a library user. Your request may be very specific - "What is former Governor Bill Clements' address?" - or it can be more complex - "What was Eleanor Roosevelt's role in the Roosevelt presidency?" Different needs require different types of sources, and the ACC LRS has many materials that can help in your search for biographical information.

First, try to narrow your search by finding basic facts about your subject. Is he alive? What is his nationality? Is she a scientist? a writer? To determine this information, try a general encyclopedia or:

Chambers Biographical Dictionary (for British biographies) (REF CT 103.C4)

Webster's Biographical Dictionary (for Americans) (REF CT 103.W4)

These resources provide brief sketches of contemporary and historical figures and are good for basic facts about hard to find individuals.

You might also try

McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Biography (REF CT 103.M27)

This 12-volume set of illustrated biographies includes subjects from around the world and for all historical periods.

If your subject is in none of these references, try

Biography Almanac (REF CT 31.B563) or **Biographical Dictionaries Master Index** (REF CT 213.B56)

These are indexes which direct you to over 250 different publications that provide biographical information.

If you determine that your subject is an American or British historical figure, the following will provide excellent information:

Dictionary of National Biography (REF DA 28.D56) and
Dictionary of American Biography (REF E 176.D563)

More like encyclopedias than dictionaries, these biographical volumes contain detailed, signed articles which provide information on subjects from Britain (in the *National Biography*) and the United States (in the *American Biography*). No living persons are included. Bibliographies accompany each article.

For more contemporary information, the *Who's Who* series may prove valuable.

Who's Who (REF DA 28.W6)
Who's Who in America (REF E 176.W642)

Who's Who in the South and the Southwest (REF E 176.W645)
Who Was Who in America (REF E176.W64)

These well-known references list thousands of brief biographical sketches of prominent people, outlining education, career history, family facts, and recreational pursuits. *Who's Who* is primarily British in slant while *Who's Who in America* and other regional titles provide coverage in their particular areas. *Who Was Who in America* lists people removed from *Who's Who in America* because of death. The historical volumes for this set begin with year 1607.

Another valuable resource for contemporary figures from throughout the world is

Current Biography Yearbook (REF CT 100.C8)

Yearly collections of biographical articles on "living leaders in all fields of human accomplishment the world over." A good source for current and past information on entertainers, prominent businessmen, scientists and politicians. The LRS has annual volumes starting with 1940.

If you know your subject's "claim to fame," try some of the reference books that focus on selected subject areas.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Political Profiles (REF E 840.6 .P64)

Articles on people prominent during a particular presidential administration. The LRS has volumes on *The Truman Years, The Eisenhower Years, The Kennedy Years, The Johnson Years, The Nixon/Ford Years.*

Who's Who in American Politics (REF E 176.W6424)

The Almanac of American Politics (REF JK 1012.A44)

The Justices of the Supreme Court (REF KF 8744.F75)

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Contemporary Authors (36 volumes; REF PN 451.C59)

Don't miss this one. Brief, informative sketches of over 71,000 authors and media people now living or recently deceased. Broad coverage includes screenwriters, songwriters, editors, cartoonists and people prominent in fields other than writing, such as Salvador Dali or George McGovern.

Dictionary of Literary Biography Series

The American Renaissance in New England (REF PS 243.A54)
Antebellum Writers in New York and the South (REF PS 129.D5 v.3)
American Novelists 1910-1945 (REF PS 129.D5 v.9)
American Novelists since World War II (REF PS 379.A554)
American Poets since World War II (REF PS 323.5 .A5)
Twentieth Century American Dramatists (REF PS 129.D5 v.7)

Other helpful titles in language and literature include:

American Women Writers (4 volumes; REF PS 147.A4)
Southern Writers: A Biographical Dictionary (REF PS 261.S59)
Science Fiction Writers (REF PS 374.S35 S36)
20th-Century Western Writers (REF PS 271.T84)

SCIENCE

American Men and Women of Science (6 volumes and 2 index volumes; REF Q 141.A47)

This includes a volume for the Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Dictionary of Scientific Biography (14 volumes plus 1 supplement; REF Q141.D5)
Modern Scientists and Engineers (3 volumes; REF Q 141.M15)

The Biography. You may want to read a biography about your subject to gain a broader, detailed picture. In the ACC LRS the biographies are mixed with other relevant books on the topic. To find a biography, look up the person's name in the SUBJECT section of the catalog. For example, biographies of historical figures are in the history section, while biographies of famous entrepreneurs are in the business section.

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